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# Art and Industry (1962): Article 02

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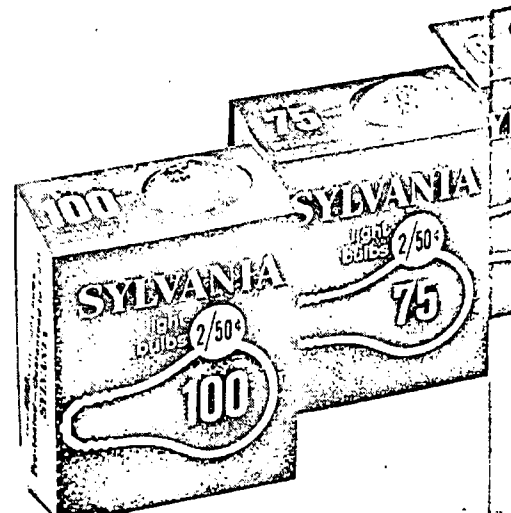
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by Walter P. Margulies, president of Lippincott & Margulies Inc., New York, has been serving the marketing needs of the biggest advertisers in the country since forming a partnership with J. Gordon Lippincott in 1946. Before that his work had included: junior architect at the Paris Exposition in 1937, designer for several buildings in the 1939 New York World's Fair, chief designer for the Statler Hotel chain.

Today, as an industrial designer and marketing consultant, he is keenly aware of the value of color in establishing brands and selling products. Here he discusses how the selection of color is becoming a marketing science



After Sylvania distinguished bulb sizes with

## Color: Has the novelty worn off

As the 1962 automobiles go on display in showrooms across the nation, Detroit manufacturers can boast another industry record. They are offering consumers the greatest choice of color in the history of the automobile.

General Motors, for example, has approximately 650 standard interior-exterior color combinations available, but it can create an infinite number of non-standard combinations to serve the needs of customers who may desire highly individualistic color combinations.

Many of the early automobile tycoons balked at the use of color; even Henry Ford—a prophet in his time—is quoted as having said: "Give them any color they want so long as it's black." But now color is playing an important marketing role for this industry as well as for many others.

Success stories directly attributable to color—especially during the '50s—are by now legend. Perhaps the most classic case is the telephone, which blossomed into a dozen fashion colors only five years ago. Since their color debut, more than 10-million color phones have been installed in American homes and offices—close to 40 per cent of all phones—despite the fact that people can have the black phones installed free of charge, but have to pay for color.

To arrive at color selections for telephones, the Bell Telephone Co. and its professional designers interviewed thousands of home owners and showed them colored shells. Two years ago they conducted another extensive study when they introduced the Princess phone; checking is continued to see what colors are selling best (white is far ahead), and the less favored colors

are dropped (brown, which was considered too close to black, and ivory). One color, turquoise, has been added because of public demand.

Another success story in selling by color is in the redesign of packages for Sylvania's light bulbs for home use. Preliminary research showed that one of the merchandising problems for this product was women's confusion about wattage sizes, which were never clearly indicated. Our company solved the problem by creating a color identification for wattage sizes: a red background in the package for the 100-watt bulb; blue for the 75-watt; green for 60; orange for 40; and brown for 25. Six months after the redesign, Sylvania's sales jumped as much as 66 per cent.

### Other elements helped

In both of these cases, of course, more than color was involved. Bell backed up its color phones with a heavy advertising campaign, promoting a phone for every room in the house. In the Sylvania program, a major element was a change in the type of box used, to make it sturdier, safer and easier to stack.

Nevertheless, in each instance color was unquestionably the key marketing factor. There have been countless other color breakthroughs: IBM with its first colored typewriters in 1954; Kimberly Clark, whose Kleenex has been popping up in color since 1937, introduced toilet tissues, paper towels, and just recently a line of table napkins in which the color version outsells the white. The list is long, varied, and crowned with success not only for the first ones to plunge into color, but also for their imitators.

We see the same bright picture

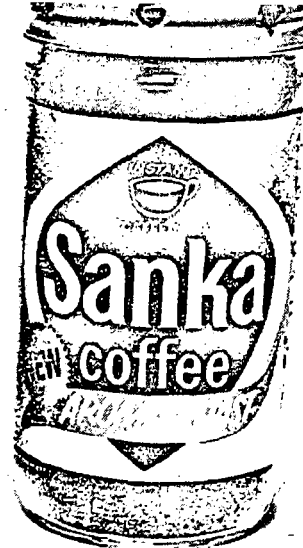
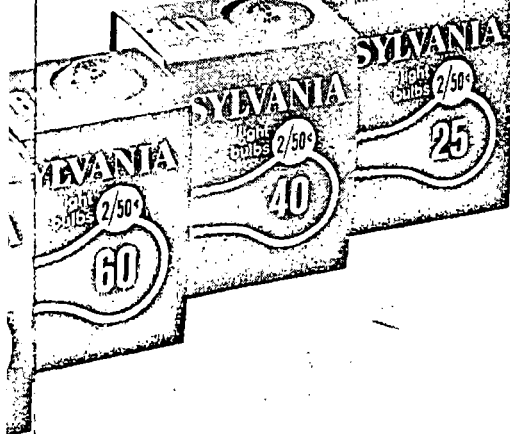
when we look at the role color has played recently in changing the images of banks, retail stores, factories and supermarkets. And in all forms of communications, in advertising, promotion and point-of-sale materials, the switch to color from black-and-white has produced very measurable and concrete sales results.

This is all well and good. As a designer, I find it pleasant to report on the tangible success of color as an important communicator. And I am sure that there will be many more I-used-color-and-look - what - happened-stories in the future.

However, the heyday of color—as an isolated element in marketing and advertising—is fast coming to an end. I do not mean at all that the sales impact of color is waning. Quite the opposite. The public's tremendous exposure since World War II to color through travel, fashion and advertising has merely whetted the appetite. But at the same time, public taste today is infinitely more sophisticated than it was a decade ago, and mere novelty of color is not going to be the primary buying factor.

It is at this point that, as a designer, I see danger signals: In spite of the many serious motivation studies that have been made, and reliable color systems developed, too many marketing men in the past have considered color a toy—merely a gimmick to raise sales in a hurry. In the past, a poor color selection (and we have seen many) had a chance of succeeding for the product because of its novelty. At least it was not necessarily disastrous. But no more.

As all of mass communications today approach a more and more scientific



color code, sales rose as much as 66 per cent

Sanka kept traditional orange and brown, but strengthened flavor connotation (r.)

# f this marketing tool?

level, we are depending increasingly on accurate measuring devices for language, names, symbols, form and color. We are finding that total communications—the singularity of impression—is the only way to cut through the interference and reach our potential consumers.

But in attempting to put color on a measurable basis, we run into two difficulties not encountered, at least to the same degree, by language or form. First, color appeals to the emotions, and thus involves countless variable factors; second, by its very nature, color is chameleon-like. The continuing demand is: "Give me any color as long as it's different."

## Researching color tastes

Reliable color research is complex. Certainly the inroads we have made have been invaluable. Our company's Package Research Institute, for example, made a study in which we found that there is a distinct relationship between design and color preferences, and socio-economic groups. Upper groups tend to look for controlled and subtle relationships in any design—whether it be in a grocery package or a work of art. The lower socio-economic groups prefer more spontaneous, uncontrolled or obvious design patterns. In the vast middle group there is a preference for sentimentalized and conservative design patterns.

We know that color tastes begin at the top and funnel down to the mass market, with a far wider range of colors at the top, changing faster, than at the bottom. We have analyzed masculine colors, feminine hues, and colors that appeal to children. But for all that, and thousands of other cogent

facts, color still defies neat and tidy categorizing.

I think that one of the pitfalls many marketing men fall into when they try to adapt color to given marketing situations is trying too hard to analyze the notes of the color symphony, without first listening to the entire composition.

Color is and always has been an art form. Historically, it has been the fine artists who have led color tastes on all levels. We can draw an analogy right from our modern abstract painters who, by ceasing to be representational, and by using color and patterns to express their own emotive forces, have awakened in us a desire for bolder uses of color, uses that until now were not accepted. In a word, they have jarred us loose from many preconceived notions—and paved the way to acceptance of new colors and to color combinations in new forms. They are in part responsible for our ready acceptance of pink typewriters, purple chairs, and combinations such as pink and orange, blue and green.

To understand our present color tastes, we should have at least a grasp of historical trends in color. The very early development of colors from plant and animal life—and the effect on the peoples at the time—gives us some insight into emotional reactions of people today. Purple, for example, was considered a royal color in ancient times because it was hard to produce and expensive. Its origin is traced back to the shell fish, purpura; it was first made in Phoenicia about 1456 B.C. Scarlet, too, extracted from an insect, Kermes, was a costly color. Solomon, in building his famed temple, said, "Send me a man cunning enough



Color first for a cigarette pack: black

to work in gold, iron, and in purple and crimson."

Blue on the other hand, was made from the plentiful woad plant and was inexpensive to produce. So was yellow, extracted from weld, turmeric and ochre. During Egyptian, Greek and Roman times, kings and noblemen wore scarlet, green and purple, mostly in pristine hues, while the poorer classes were garbed in duller shades of woad blue, madder red and yellow ochre.

The Greeks, with a genius for simplicity and functionalism, succeeded in merging the intellectual approach with the emotional, to bring about the most appropriate use of color. The Parthenon, which we admire today for its white Pentelic marble, was at one time resplendent in bright colors.

In the Byzantine period, extending from 395 A.D. to the 14th Century, we see the use of gold leaf and color to add richness to the spiritual quality of paintings, and the use of color more for symbolism than for its descriptive abilities or emotional appeal.

But the modern story of color and art started with the Renaissance, the age of originality, individualism, pag-

WHAT THE



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entry and luxury, which had its beginnings in the 14th Century in Italy. Painters attempting to recreate nature led public tastes in brilliant blues, reds, greens and aquamarine blue, which was made from the semi-precious stone, lapis lazuli. Homes, public buildings, textures and clothes all picked up this magnificence.

In the Baroque period, a style of art and architecture reaching from the time of Michelangelo to the 18th Century, we see a feminine influence and a softening of color, with tertiary colors combined with tints and soft-ened shades.

The Rococo period, developed in France chiefly under Louis XV in the 18th Century, also is known for art that reproduced nature in the most realistic ways and for popularizing such colors as jonquil gold and off-whites combined with lilac rose or French blue. Then there was a direct swing back to vibrant colors in the era of Napoleon, whose own personal whim for primary colors set the taste standards of his time.

In the 19th Century the Impressionistic school, whose nucleus included Manet, Monet, Pissaro, Degas, Renoir and other famous painters, contributed to a new way of looking at color as light. They evolved the theory of "broken light" based on the colors of the spectrum.

### No "snob" colors today

Even this condensed capsule of color history gives us some insight into the weaving, shifting patterns of taste. The purple so noble in the past has had a zigzag career and today can mean many things. In neon signs or cheaper clothes, it is considered flashy. Yet, used sensitively by designers as an accent color for homes, it is stylish.

The point is that today, unlike any period in our history, we have no "snob" colors, *per se*, because the cost of all colors is gradually equalizing. We can use almost any color and slant it for a specific market. Whether it ends up as high fashion for a select few or for a mass audience depends not so much on the color as on its combination with other colors in graphics, and the application of the materials on which it appears. For example, two exact yellows can be specified for drapery material, but if one is to appear on an inexpensive nylon and one on heavy brocade, the effect—and the market—will be widely diverse.

In a design our company did recently for a Kroger supermarket in Illinois, color played an important role in establishing new concepts for supermarket merchandising, but its part in the over-all design was no less and no more important than the other

graphics, forms, and lighting techniques and materials we employed to recreate the charm of old-fashioned specialty shops. The interior was broken into stores-within-a-store, with each little "store" picking up its personality from the type of product it sold. We used pink in the bakery, green for the produce department, a rosy red for the meat section, and a rich brown in the tobacco shop. These are conventional colors—but applied to fresh new materials for a supermarket, such as woods and marbles, they helped create a new and exciting store.

When we speak of changing tastes in color, we must clarify two points: First, the color must never be too far ahead of the public. A flashy yellow in Victorian days would certainly have been a contrast in homes then . . . but it never would have been accepted.

Second, custom as well as psychology forbids the use of certain colors with certain products. Colored bread, for instance, was a miserable flop, and oleo without its yellow simply would not sell. We doubt that a red package for a mentholated cigarette could be convincing, or that a grey and black package would effectively sell soap.

#### The clichés aren't ironclad

But color clichés in many product categories can be broken. In cigarettes, which our research shows are considered a highly personal item, the packages are generally red, blue, white or brown. However, in a design for a new Canadian cigarette, Peter Jackson, we broke this color barrier by using black as the main color, combined with gold and white in a severely controlled graphic design. The result was a quality package immediately successful in its intended masculine class market.

Another delicate matter that can make or break sales is the question of what to change and what not to change in working with color. Sales can be seriously affected if the color familiar to the public is suddenly replaced by another. In a survey to determine the best color for coffee packaging, our company interviewed 200 housewives in this manner: On a table we placed four coffee cans—red, blue, brown and yellow. All were solid colors, with no other graphic elements. Beside each can was a steaming cup of coffee made from the coffee in the can. The housewives were asked to taste the coffee from each cup and to tell which they thought was "coffier." What they were not told was that the coffee in all the cans was exactly the same.

Of those tested, 73 per cent felt the coffee in the brown can was too strong, and 84 per cent believed the coffee in the red can had a richer

# NOVEMBER 7



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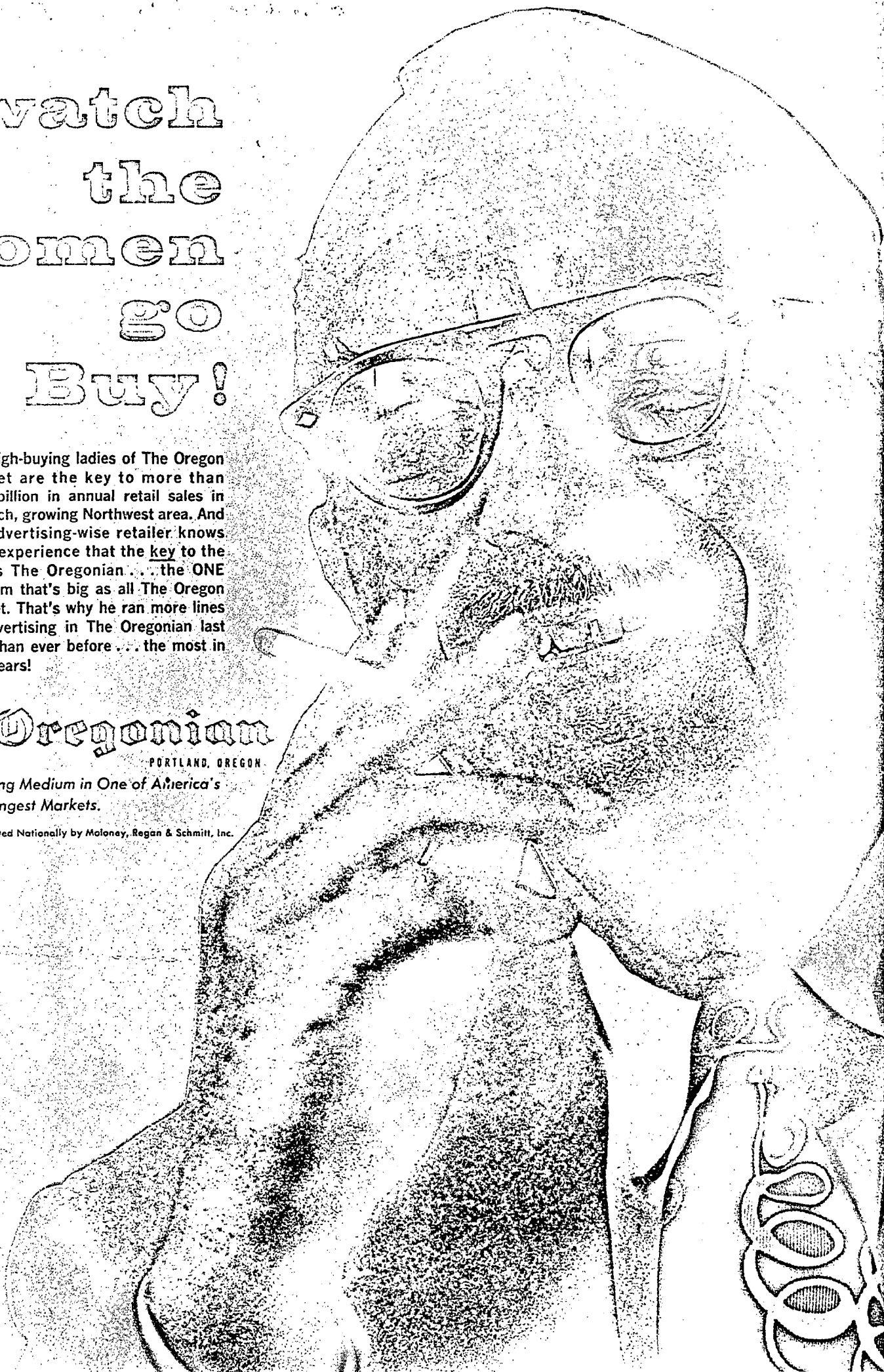
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flavor; to most, the blue can suggested a milder flavor, and the yellow connoted a weaker blend.

However, if all coffee cans were red, the color would be a useless selling aid. So once we decided to use red, we still needed a design that would be distinctive if it were to function as a potent sales aid.

In our redesign for the Sanka Instant jar label, research revealed that housewives liked the orange and brown col-

"If all coffee cans were red, the color would be a useless selling aid. So once we decided to use red, we still needed a design that would be distinctive"

ors and associated them with Sanka. Here we made use of a color paradox: Though people remember color and associate it with a product, their memory span for a particular shade is very short. Thus we were able to improve the Sanka orange and brown, to give those colors a heartier, richer flavor connotation without losing any of the Sanka franchise on these colors.

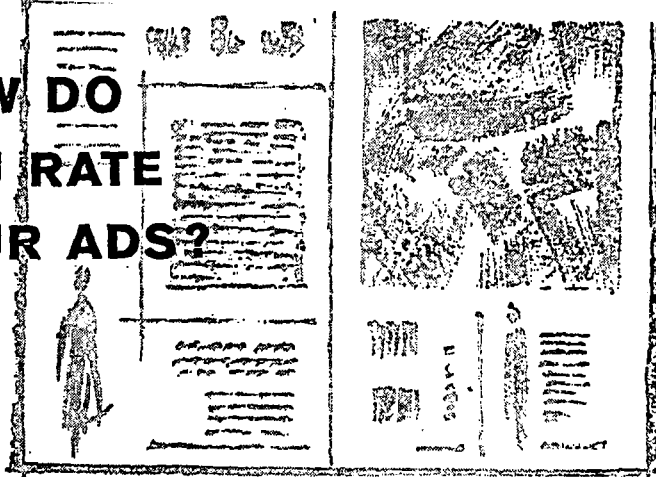
#### Some colors don't weaken

Ideal, of course, are the design and the color that wear forever without change. Examples are around, but they are few. The classic black-and-white of the Chanel bottle is one. Another notable example is the Howard Johnson chain restaurants, whose orange roofs dotting the highways act as an unmistakable and memorable trademark for the name. It will be a long time before custom dulls this tasteful and suitable use of color for roadside restaurant imagery.

But without question, design changes in packaging, in products and interiors are about to be accelerated to satisfy the public's restless demand. At the same time, unnecessary changes to undo a mistake of the past are prohibitively costly these days. Thus it is especially important, in planning corporate identity programs, to determine in advance the graphics and color that will work long into the future.

Used wisely and well, color can be a positive force in establishing brand imagery, in moving packages off the shelf, in creating sales for products, and in creating atmosphere for all kinds of interiors. We are, ready or not, in the age of color.

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